

Recent views on the origins of clerical celibacy: A review of the literature from 1980-1991*

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Підсумок

У 1980 році бельгійський домініканець Роже Грісон написав перегляд літератури попередньої декади про історію celibату в Римо-Католицькій Церкві. Стаття поміщена нижче п. з. «Література про початки священничого celibату: перегляд статей з років 1980-91», це продовження студії Грісона. Автор, римо-католицький професор богослов'я в Університеті св. Павла в Оттаві, Кевін Коїл, зосереджує увагу на двох авторів: французького єзуїта Крістіана Кочіні, та українського католицького священника, о. Романа Чолія. Кочіні, у своїй докторській праці, настоював, що примусовий celibат безпосередньо походить з апостольських часів. Чолій, у своїй докторській праці, прийняв аргументи Кочіні до тої міри, що вважав що римо-католицька практика, яка мовляв обоснована на апостольській практиці, доказує що присутність жонатого клиру в Східних Церквах, це зміна апостольського передання.

Після детальної аналізи прерізних джерел, та творів багатьох інших, здебільша римо-католицьких авторів, проф. Коїл доказує, що є неможливим твердити що *примусовий* celibат походить з апостольських часів.



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The requirement that clergy of the Roman Catholic Church observe perpetual celibacy (a requirement also imposed in certain Eastern Catholic jurisdictions) continues to elicit discussion by historians, theologians, Vatican authorities, and the media. The interest is currently fuelled by concerns over a shortage of priests of the Latin Catholic rite,¹ as well as by shifts in views on ecclesiology, ministry, and sexuality. Nor ought one to overlook the many depressing reports of sexual scandals involving Catholic clergy in North America,² or, for that matter, sociological studies of clerical and religious lifestyles,³ while theologians continue to publish research on the Catholic clergy in general and celibacy in particular.⁴

The present article does not presume to discuss the merits of clerical celibacy itself, but to review recent discussion by scholars of the origins of the current discipline for clergy in Roman Catholicism. It will pay special attention to the two works primarily responsible for keeping the issue alive at this level during the 1980's and into the 1990's. In 1980 Roger Gryson examined works of the preceding decade on the same issue,⁵ as a follow-up to his famous book

¹ See R. Hotz, "Soll jeder Priester Mönch sein? Zur ostkirchlichen Tradition des verheirateten Priesters und des Zölibats", *Diakonia* 16 (1985), 404–11. Even some bishops have proposed that married *virī probati* be considered for presbyteral ordination, arguing that the right of God's people to regular eucharistic celebrations outweighs the need for a celibate clergy. See the pastoral letter, "Facing the Future With Hope," of Remberth Weakland, Archbishop of Milwaukee, of November 1, 1991 (draft version in *Origins* (Catholic News Service), vol. 20, no. 33 [January 24, 1991], 535–40), par. 8–10. Also episcopal interventions at the international synod held in Rome in October 1990 (e.g. *Origins*, vol. 20, no. 21 [Nov. 1, 1990], 338–39), and later on: see *The Tablet* (Nov. 16, 1991), 1420–21. The revised Code of Canon Law of 1983 (canons 1031, art. 2, and 1042, art. 1) already permits the ordination of married "proven men" to the diaconate. See R. Puza, "Virī uxorati—virī probati. Kanonistisch—historische Überlegungen" in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 172 (1992), 16–23.

² See, for instance, *The Report of the Archdiocesan Commission of Enquiry into the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy*, 3 vols., St. John's (Newfoundland), Canada: 1990.

³ For example, A.W.R. Sipe. *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, New York: 1990.

⁴ Besides Hotz (above, n. 1), see S.H. Pfürtner, "Der Zölibat—ein Instrument 'heiliger Herrschaft'?", *Diakonia* 20 (1989), 89–100. Also the series of articles in *The Tablet* for August 12, 19 and 26, 1989 by (respectively) A. Tilby, R. Foxcroft, and A. Greeley.

⁵ R. Gryson, "Dix ans de recherches sur les origines du célibat ecclésiastique. Réflexion sur les publications des années 1970–79," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 11 (1980), 157–85.

of 1970,⁶ wherein he had argued that there is no historical evidence earlier than the late fourth century to support the present-day Roman Catholic requirement of perpetual clerical celibacy. Much of the literature Gryson reviewed at the time had, of course, appeared in response to himself. Since then, discussion has orbited around the 1981 work of Christian Cochini (translated in 1991 into English), and the subsequent publications of Roman Cholij.⁷

This article, then, will focus primarily on these two authors, in an effort to extend Gryson's overview of 1980 to literature that has appeared since on the same subject.⁸ It will do this, in the first two sections, through a discussion of the thesis of Cochini and Cholij by other commentators (listed at the end of this article) as well as by the writer of this overview, paying close attention to the main sources in Christian antiquity invoked by Cochini and Cholij. A third section will look briefly at other authors who have to some extent entered the debate. The various points of view are referenced in the text of the following pages, or in the notes. Where there is no attribution, the views expressed are my own.

Throughout, a distinction (made by both Cochini: 71 and Cholij PP 1989: 301–303) will be maintained between “celibacy,” in the sense of being unmarried as a *sine qua non* for receiving major orders (diaconate, presbyterate or episcopate)—the current discipline in Roman Catholicism (and some Eastern Catholic eparchies)—, and the terms “chastity” and “continence.” Chastity means the virtue which regulates the sexual appetite, regardless of one's state of life; in Western canonical terms, however, it has come to mean the practice of continence within a consecrated (religious) state. Continence, which means the voluntary abstention from sexual activity within

⁶ Idem, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique du premier au septième siècle* (Recherches et Synthèses, Section d'histoire, 2), Gembloux: 1970.

⁷ See e.g., A. Nichols, *Holy Order: Apostolic Priesthood from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* (Oscott Series, 5), Dublin: 1990, 155–65.

⁸ For this reason, since each is a reprint of a work that first appeared in the 1970s, I exclude H. Crouzel's *Mariage et divorce, célibat et caractère sacerdotaux dans l'Eglise ancienne. Etudes diverses* (Etudes d'histoire du culte et des institutions chrétiennes, 2), Turin: 1982, and Charles A. Frazee, “The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church” in *Church History* 57, Supplement (1988), 108–16. Two unpublished licentiate theses in canon law defended at the Catholic University of America (Washington) offer only a summary treatment of the historical data: L.T. Persico, *The Law of Celibacy for the Ukrainian and Ruthenian Churches in the United States. A Historical Development* (1982), 2–8; and P. Weinhoff, *The Celibacy of Deacons* (1983), 3–25.

marriage, can be temporary or perpetual; when it is the latter, it means celibacy in the wide sense, or *lex continentiae*.⁹

I. Christian Cochini

A. The thesis

Cochini's volume, originally a doctoral dissertation defended in 1969 at the Institut Catholique (Paris) in 1969, and translated two years ago into English, drew attention by re-orienting the whole debate, through an elaborate defense of what he views as an undeviating *sensus Ecclesiae* of the Catholic tradition of the first centuries [Cochini: 469], even as seen in the light of a history broadly defined as "the memory of humanity" [Cochini: 39].¹⁰ Cochini's fundamental thesis is therefore a simple one: as Gryson had shown, from the 4th century on we have clear legislation prohibiting major clerics, married or not, from sexual relations once they received orders [Cochini: 70–71].¹¹ However, Cochini parts ways with Gryson over what the lack of pre-fourth century ecclesiastical legislation on this issue signifies. Where Gryson concluded that there had simply never been any, Cochini infers that such legislation existed from apostolic times, regarding not celibacy of the type known in Roman Catholicism today, but continence. This would have constituted an unwritten law of the whole Church until the 4th century, when the need and the possibility of written legislation, in the light of Christianity's new-found freedom, had emerged. "Concluons que l'obligation faite aux diacres, aux prêtres et aux évêques mariés de garder la continence parfaite avec leur épouse n'est pas dans l'Eglise le fruit d'une élaboration tardive, mais est au contraire, dans toute l'acception du terme, une *tradition non-écrite d'origine apostolique* qui, à notre connaissance, trouva sa première expression canonique au 4^e siècle" (Cochini: 475, his emphasis; see also 277).

⁹ On this expression see L. Hödl, "Die 'lex continentiae': Eine problemgeschichtliche Studie über den Zölibat" in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 83 (1961), 325–44. Hödl, however, takes an uncritical approach to early Christian sources: see 332–35.

¹⁰ Cochini was reacting to two works in particular, both published in Paris in 1967: J.-P. Audet, *Mariage et célibat dans le service de l'Eglise: Histoire et orientation*; and E. Schillebeeckx, *Autour du célibat du prêtre: Etude critique*, a translation of *Het ambtscelebaat in de branding* (Bilthoven: 1966), in *English Celibacy* (New York: 1968).

¹¹ This is not new in itself, having been frequently uttered since at least the latter part of the last century [Cochini: 54–56 and 72; Cholij AHC 1987: 139; CCEW 1989: 70–71].